

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING
ON S. 361, LEGISLATION TO AMEND
THE FAA'S AGE 60 RULE
MARCH 13, 2001

- C During the last Congress, the Aviation Subcommittee held two hearings on the issue of pilot shortages and how they impact rural air service. The Committee learned that, as air travel has expanded along with the economy, the major airlines have been hiring record numbers of pilots over the last few years. The high demand for pilots has put a squeeze on the regional and on-demand air carriers because the larger airlines tend to hire pilots away from the smaller ones. Similarly, our armed forces have been drained of many top pilots who have been attracted to the private sector by the generous pay scales and benefits offered by major airlines. As I have said before, a shortage of pilots in our military can affect our combat readiness.
- C One of the ways to ease the pressure on smaller carriers and the military is to increase the size of the pool of eligible pilots. Of course, that pool is directly affected by the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Age 60 Rule, which prohibits anyone from being a commercial airline pilot once they reach the age of 60. Senator Murkowski's bill, S. 361, would increase the mandatory retirement age to 65 years. This legislation has the potential to ease the shortage of civilian pilots and reduce the pressure for military pilots to leave the service early.
- C Any change to the rule should not be undertaken lightly because of the potential impact on safety. You do not need a medical degree to recognize that physical and mental capacities do not remain the same as we get older, and the chance of sudden incapacity naturally increases. But the retirement age of 60 was established somewhat arbitrarily more than 40 years ago. Life expectancies have increased and medical science has advanced considerably since then. In addition, those who support changing the Age 60 Rule logically point out that older pilots usually have more experience, which can make all the difference in an emergency.
- C As I noted at the time of our last hearing, there are clearly divided opinions among pilots, policy makers, and others within the aviation community. After years of looking at this issue, I believe that it may be time to reconsider whether the Age 60 Rule is an appropriate and fair standard. Safety is paramount, but there are almost certainly ways of ensuring that pilots who decide to fly beyond the age of 60 are fit and capable. It is noteworthy that 25 European nations have increased the mandatory retirement age for pilots to 65 years of age. I am sure these countries

considered the safety implications of such a change and concluded that it would not harm air travelers. This may be a case where other nations are ahead of the United States in terms of balancing safety and fairness.

C I thank our witnesses for their participation and I look forward to a vigorous debate.